

## Middle East Report by Thierry Lalevée

### Elections mean stability for Turkey

*The Nov. 29 vote gave Turkey a broadly supported government under Premier Özal—as the country faces profound challenges.*

With the victory of the Anavatan (Motherland) party of Premier Turgut Özal in the Nov. 29 elections, Turkey is now governed by the strongest political force in three decades. Through the 1960s and 1970s, until the 1980 military coup, Turkey was ruled by unstable coalitions which led the country into chaos. Left- and right-wing armed guerrillas killed hundreds in Ankara and Istanbul. No one party had ever gotten the majority of 292 seats in the Parliament, as the Anavatan did in this last election.

The September national referendum had been a warning to Özal, prime minister since 1984. After the 1980 coup, scores of politicians were banned from politics by a constitutional amendment, deemed undemocratic at a time when Ankara is negotiating entry into the European Community. The government decided to hold a referendum on the amendment, itself favoring a negative answer to the political comeback. However, a slim "yes" majority allowed politicians like Bulent Ecevit or Suleyman Demirel, Socialist and Conservative prime ministers of the late 1970s, to run again. The narrow margin in their favor was understood to mean that while Turks wanted national elections, they backed Özal by rejecting opposition appeals for a "massive yes."

Özal took the hint and decided to call early parliamentary elections, instead of waiting till 1988.

Only a strong government with broad support can deal with the challenges Turkey faces. Topping the agenda are the negotiations on Turkey's foreign debt and its strategic

military situation. Ankara has been holding talks with the United States on the issue of the Foreign Military Sales (FMS), and its military debts to Washington. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Economic Affairs, W. Alan Wallis, visited Turkey on Nov. 23. Washington has refused to lower interest rates on previous credit, and demands a high price before considering rescheduling. This forced Ankara to hike prices for petroleum, paper, communications, and air travel right after the elections.

Also key is Turkey's strategic position toward the Soviet Union. In Brussels on Dec. 1, Defense Minister Zaki Yavuztürk reiterated Turkey's support for the INF negotiations, as all other NATO countries have done. Yet Turkish military layers are less than happy about a pact that leaves them almost defenseless before superior Soviet conventional forces. The issue was brutally raised on Oct. 26 during the visit to Turkey of former NATO Supreme Commander Gen. Bernard Rogers, a foe of the treaty. Talking to the media on the consequences of the treaty for Turkey, he warned that other NATO members will lack either the will or the capacity to come to Turkey's aid in case of Soviet aggression.

Zaki Yavuztürk in the fall had warned that an INF treaty which would not lead to a similar reduction in conventional forces was "dangerous." Picking up on Rogers's declaration, Turkish officials asked for an official clarification from NATO headquarters. Rogers's successor General Galvin and Lord Carrington, NATO sec-

retary general, denied that this was NATO's policy, insisting that the "alliance is committed to defend all of its members from Norway to Turkey." The statement didn't address the issue raised, which was not of general principle, but whether NATO would still be *capable* of meeting such commitments. Both Carrington and Galvin then went to Istanbul to address a seminar of the Atlantic Treaty Assembly to reiterate their support for Turkey, but while declarations came out of Brussels, few, if any, came from Washington.

Turkish officials are seeking to create some complementary, if not alternative, political and military ties in the region. Besides a major effort to join the EC, Turkey has begun forging ties with Pakistan, Egypt and the Gulf Cooperation Council, to break the aversive environment created by the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, and Syria. Turkey held joint military naval maneuvers with Pakistan during the summer, and has also made efforts to better relations with Greece. A possible summit between Turgut Özal and Greek Prime Minister Andreas Papandreu is mooted. Turkey will attend the January 1988 conference of the Countries of the Balkans, in an effort to solve its thorny relationship with Bulgaria.

The Soviets are taking an obvious interest. For the first time in decades, the Soviet foreign minister is expected in Ankara in January to develop "closer ties." Moscow's ambassador, Albert Cernisev, surprised many on Oct. 27 as he announced that the Soviet Union has neither "political nor military" interest in Cyprus, concluding that the "people of Cyprus" should "themselves solve the crisis." This sharply contrasted with Moscow's calls for an international conference over Cyprus, a proposal the State Department accepts.